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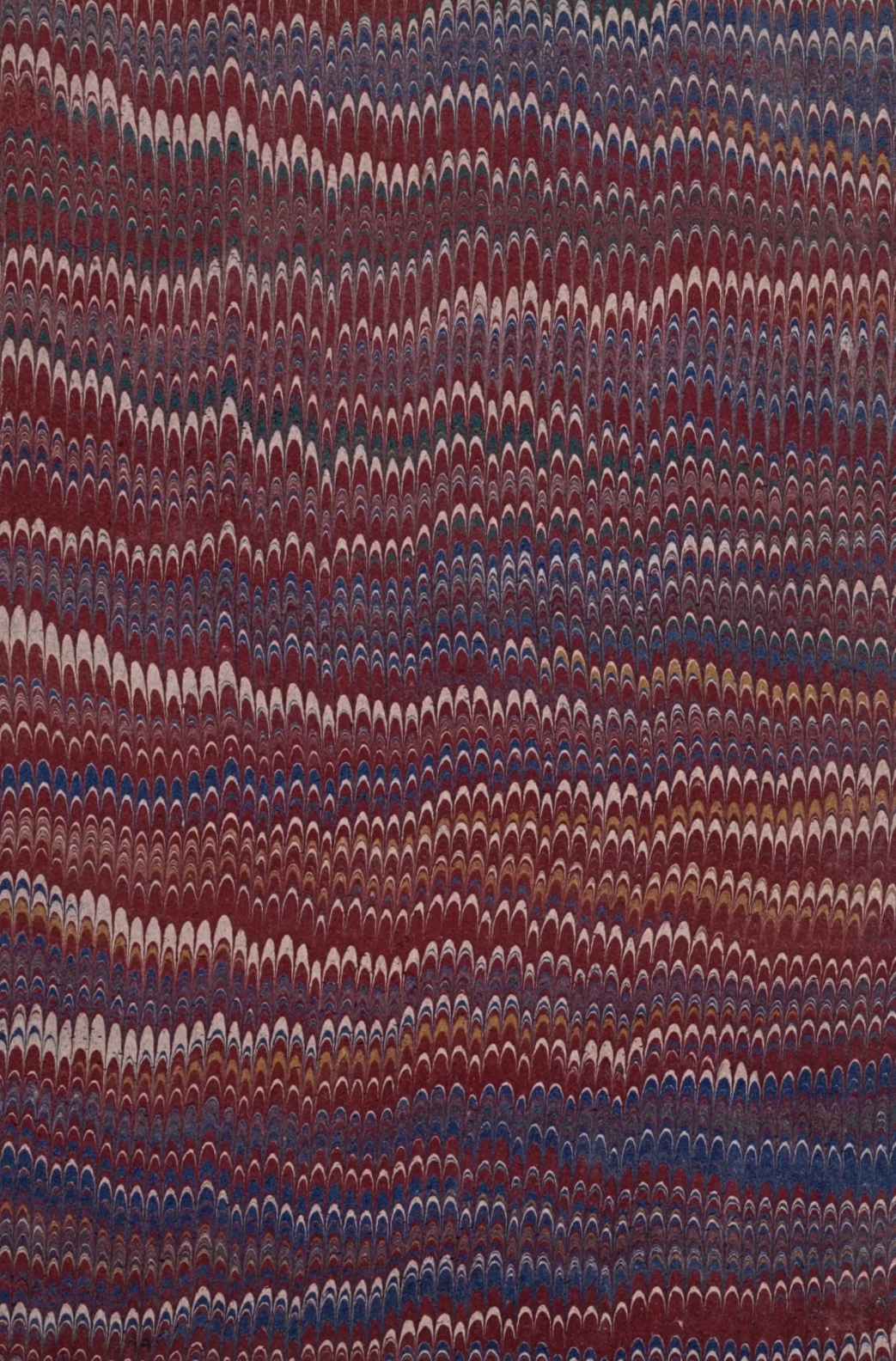

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BY

JOHN STRANGE WINTER.

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MIGNON'S SECRET.

CHAPTER I.

It was a cold and cheerless day in February; the sky overhead was lowering and leaden, a dull gray color too sulky to be stormy. The ground beneath was soaked and sodden by a fine, drizzling rain, which had fallen for hours without ceasing, and the big square of the cavalry barracks at York looked altogether as miserable and wretched as it is possible even for a barrack square to look, though it is not in general a picturesque spot, or one suggestive of ease and comfort.

As everybody knows who has been there, the main block of buildings set apart for the officers' quarters lies facing the principal entrance gates—a two-storied building of red brick, with a door in the center, having a row of windows on either side, with another unbroken row of windows above. To the right of this block, as you approach it, stands the little villa of the commanding officer; to the left, the mess-rooms.

The dusk was already beginning to gather in the day to its repose; a tired horseman, in soaked and sodden covert coat, on a weary and mud-splashed hunter, turned in at the gates, and rode down to the mess. A sentry here and

there stood in his box and stared stolidly at the rain, relieving mind and body alike every now and then by a turn along his track, in which, instead of treading with a ringing and martial clank, his heels sunk like the hoofs of a horse on the edge of a morass—sunk softly, to be followed with a sucking sound, as they were lifted from the spongy earth. But in the large billiard-room all was light and warmth and cheerfulness. Almost every officer in the barracks was there, engaged partly in watching a game between Miles and Preston, and partly in listening to Lucy, who was holding forth as he stood with his back to the roaring fire, his legs well apart, and the long tails of his frock-coat drawn through his arms.

"It was in this way," he was saying. "I—er—happened to be in the office this morning, when I heard an awful commotion outside. 'Aw—I wawnt the awdjudant,' I heard a voice say.

"'The hadjudant is 'unting to-day, sir,' I heard the sergeant answer.

"'Aw—dawm nuisance,' said the voice; 'I paw—pawticularly wawnted to see the awdjudant—*pawticularly.*'

"'I'm vewry sorwry, sir,' wreplied the sergeant, with what I must say was equal to the patience of Job."

"Solomon, you mean, Lucy," laughed one of his hearers.

Lucy looked up, his placid eyes unmoved. "Ah! *was* it Solomon?" he said, mildly. "Always had a sort of ideah that it was Job. Couldn't say for certain, of course—never knew either of the gentlemen personally. However, that's neither hewre nor thewre. The voice continued that it was

pawticularly annawing not to be able to see the awdjudant, having come all the way fwrom Mawnchester solely to see him—so I thought, as he had come all the way fwrom Mawnchester, I had better find out what it—er—was he wanted with Dounne, so I said to the orderly: 'Go and find out—er—what that—er—gentleman wants.'

"'Wawnt to see the awdjudant,' was the wreply he bawled out at the top of his voice. Poor devil of an orderly put it into decent form, and—er—bwrought it in as a message.

"'Ask his name,' I said. 'You can tell him he can see me if he likes'—for I didn't know, you know, whether the fell-ah might not be a sort of fwriend of Dounne's, and want to leave a message.

"'Oh! yaws,' I heard him bawl outside, 'I'll see Captain Lucy. Say Cwrooks of Mawnchester wishes to see him.'

"'Muster Cwrooks, of MAWNchester, sorr,' was the way that the orderly announced him. Poor devil hadn't the ghost of an idea that Mawnchester stood for Cottonopolis—and then 'Cwrooks of Mawnchester' walked in.

"'I'm Cwrooks of Mawnchester,' said he, in an aw-fully important voice.

"'Are you, indeed?' said I. 'And pwray what can I do for you, Mr. Cwrooks of Mawnchester?'

"'I wawnted to see the awdjudant,' said he; 'I wawnt to enlist.'

"'Oh! you *wawnt* to enlist, do you?' said I; 'and what makes you wawnt to enlist, hey?'

"'Aw—I've had a shine with my governor,' he told me.

'And, besides that, I've had about as much of Mawnchester as I can stand. Dawm common place—wawnt to get out of it.'

"'Well, Mr. Cwrooks, of Mawnchester,' said I, with an exceedingly civil and—er—fwriendly tone, 'you'wre a vewry young gentleman, and, judging fwrom appeawrances, I should say have evidently yet to learn what wroughing it means. Now let me tell you,' said I, 'that wroughing it in a barwrack as a pwrivate soldier is a vewry diffewrent thing to wroughing it on the moors or over in Norway. You've got a vewry smart velvet jacket on, Mr. Cwrooks,' said I; and so it was, wreal velvet—none of your velveteen. 'And you've got a pair of nice white hands, which don't look as if they had done much work in their day. Now, if I enlist you, thewre'll be no more velvet jackets, no more white hands; you'll have to—er—black your boots, pipeclay all your facings—beastly job that, ten times worse than cleaning a stable out, which, of course, will also be part of your work. You'll have to—er cawry water, gwroom horses, clean out dwrains—er—in short, do evewry sort of filthy work you can imagine. I assure you, Mr. Cwrooks, you had vewry much better go home to Mawnchester, and—er—tell your fath-aw that you will forgive him this time. Life as a gay and gallant Lancer is, take my word for it, not *all* beer and skittles. Quite the contwrawry.'"

"'But should *I*—*I*, Cwrooks, of Mawnchester, have to do *that* sort of work?' he gasped.

"'You—er—wouldn't be Cwrooks of Mawnchester here, you know,' I suggested mildly. 'You'd only be

Pwrivate Cwrooks, and pwrobably not thought much of at that.'

"'But—aw—I should only associate with the officers,' he explained. Yes"—as a roar of laughter burst from his hearers as one man—"I'm not joking, I assure you."

"And what did you say to that, Lucy?" Miles demanded.

"Say? I said, 'Oh! would you?' vewry politely.

"'Yaws,' he went on; 'of course, as a gentleman, I should natuwrally associate with my equals, who would be the—'

"'Wranks,' I put in gently. 'It is quite—er—clear to me, Mr. Cwrooks, and I am—er—wrather pwressed for time just now, that you had much better go home and forgive your father—much better; the Scarlet Lancers would not suit you at all;' and so, vewry wreluctantly, Mis-taw Cwrooks of Mawnchester took himself away."

"What sort of chap was he?" Preston inquired.

"Pasty-faced, unwholesome-looking fellow," Lucy answered. "Wregular duffer all round, I should think."

"With an inordinate opinion of himself, of course?"

"Oh, im—mense!" Lucy returned, with emphasis. "Well, I must be off—pwromised to look in and see how Gwraves's little terwrier gets on during his absence."

"Where is it?"

"In charge of Derwrick's wife."

"But it's so beastly wet, and Derrick lives over the other side of the barracks," Miles objected. "If I were you, I should let the terrier slide for to-day—little yelping brute."

"Got my cloak here," Lucy answered, struggling, or, to speak quite correctly, slipping into the garment in ques-

tion. "Yes, it is wrather a beastly sort of night, but—" A shrug of his shoulders completed the sentence, and the next moment he had disappeared into the cold, dark, and cheerless evening.

CHAPTER II.

It was by that time quite dark; the rain was still coming down with steady persistence, but more heavily than it had done aforetime; the ground was more spongy, and the various sentries placed about the square seemed to have given up taking turns to and fro, and had retreated into the shelter of their boxes.

Lucy tramped along as quickly as possible, passing in front of the officers' quarters, then turning to the left, and keeping in front of the several blocks of stables and troop-rooms facing the square, and then, passing behind them, went across the open piece of ground which lies between them and the married quarters.

Derrick and his wife lived in the last hut, so Lucy had to pass them all in order to reach it. They looked comfortable and cozy enough, with curtains drawn over the windows, through which, being mostly red, the light gleamed warmly. All was quiet—only the sound of a horse or two stamping in the nearest stable broke the silence, besides the steady downpour of the rain; and then Lucy stopped short to listen—to listen to what? To the suppressed and bitter sobs of a child, crying as if its heart would break.

He stood still for a moment to make quite sure that the

child was indeed outside instead of inside one of the huts. Yes; there was no mistake about it. A child was sobbing passionately, yet under its breath, close at hand, and the rain was coming down with a steady, monotonous, pitiless persistence.

"Hi! I say!" called Lucy, in his soft and smooth voice —"what's the mat-tah?"

The sobs ceased for a moment, as if the little troubled body was making a brave effort to conceal the sound; then, with a great choke and a gurgle, they burst forth again more passionately than before. Lucy stepped out cautiously in the darkness, guided by the sound. "Whewre are you?" he asked, feeling about where he imagined the little body must be. There was an instant's dead silence; then a sniffle just below him gave him the clew, and the next moment he had put his hand upon the soaked and thinly clad figure of a child.

It was a very thin shoulder which flinched under his grasp, and he felt, by the long hair, that it was a girl.

"Who are you?" he asked; but there was no reply. "Are you one of the barwrack youngsters—hey?" he went on, kindly. "Come, tell me."

There was another pause, a fierce struggle for breath, and then a shaking, sobbing voice answered, "I'm—I'm Private Henderson's *girl.*"

"And what are you doing out hewre?" Lucy added. "Come, don't be afwraid to answer me."

"M—m—mother turned me out"—with a fresh burst of sobs.

"Turned you out? Into the wrain?"—incredulously.

He had drawn her then into the faint red light cast through the red curtains of the next hut; he saw that she was a little slip of a child of ten years old or so; he saw, too, that she was soaked with rain, cold as the grave, her little tear-stained face looking pinched and blue, and that her bare hands and arms were as red as raw beef.

"And why did she turn you out?"

"'Cause she was afraid father'd see I'd been crying," she sobbed out.

"And why have you been cwrying?" Lucy asked. Having taken any notice at all, he went patiently to work to sift the whole affair to the very bottom.

"'Cause mother beat me so"—with another burst of tears at the remembrance of it.

"But why?"

"'Cause I went round to the carnteen for some beer, an'—an' I fell coming back, and braoke the jug—an' I cut my knee an' my 'and, an' I *couldn't* help it!"

"And your moth-aw didn't want Henderson to know she'd been beating you?"

"No. Father never lets her—not if he knows it."

"Is she your own moth-aw?"

"No"—shaking her head and rubbing her knuckles into her red and swollen eyes.

"Ah!"

Lucy deliberated a moment, and the child, after the manner of children, having lost her fear, volunteered a little further information.

"Father," said she, with a sudden accession of confidence in her tone, and of that peculiar jargon which obtains in

the lowest level of society in a barrack, "'e don't allaow mother to 'ave no beer 'tween whiles; an' mother she says she gets to feeling low like in 'er inside, you know"—with a feeling outspreading of her little scarlet hand over the region of the digestive organs—"and so she sends me out while father was over at staibles, and now she's afraid as 'ow he'll arsk for the jug."

"Ah! Which is Henderson's hut?" Lucy demanded.

"That"—pointing to it.

Lucy strode to the door, and hammered upon it with his stick. A voice within shouted to him to enter. Lucy knocked imperatively again, which brought Henderson out to open it in double-quick time. He stared with amazement to see the officer standing in the rain; then the remembrance of Mrs. Derrick's charge seemed to come to him.

"Captain Graves's dorg's at Derrick's hut, sir," he told him. "The last hut in this line."

"It's not the dog, Henderson," answered Lucy, with gravity; "it's something much worse than the dog. Can I come in?"

"Yes, sir."

Henderson made way for his officer to pass him, and then saw, for the first time, that he had fast hold of his little motherless girl. Lucy, for all his slowness of speech and affectation of manner, was quick enough to see that the man cast a look, positively of fear, at his wife.

"What's she been doing, sir?" he asked, in a husky voice. "I never knew the lass steal aught in my life."

"She has happened with a misfortune," answered Lucy,

deliberately; then gently pushed the child forward. "Look at her condition! See! Soaked to the skin, chilled to the bone. Would you turn a dog out on such a night?" he demanded, his voice rising.

"Turn 'er out!" stammered Private Henderson. "Why, sir, I never thought of such a thing."

"But your wife did," Lucy rejoined, sharply; then suddenly turned quickly upon the woman. "No, you needn't go away, Mrs. Henderson; you'll stop hewre, if you please, and hear this thwrough."

"What is it?" Henderson demanded, fiercely; "'ave you been a-beating of 'er again? Do you mean as 'ow you turned my little lass out on such a night?" clutching hold of the child, and confronting his wife with flaming eyes. "Is that what you've been a-doing of?"

"She's always a-breaking of something," returned the woman, with an evil look at the child.

"What was it? How did you come to do it, Jack?" he demanded of the child.

"I was bringing 'ome the jug from the carnteen," Jack answered, "an' I cut myself orful bad when I fell," showing her hand, and pulling up the skirt of her thin frock to show a very skinny knee, with a bad cut upon it.

"An' you beat her after *that?*" thundered Private Henderson, indignantly.

"You'd better," broke in Lucy, in his slow tones, "see that the child gets those wet clothes off before she gets wrheumatic fev-ah! And—er—Mrs. Henderson, this is not the first time I've heard of your ill using your husband's child. If it happens again, or I hear of your turning her

out-of-doors, as to-night, I shall have you taken off the stwrength at once. Do you quite understand?"

"I'll see to it, sir," answered the trooper. "Jack, my girl, get your clothes off, an' warm yourself, when you've thanked the capt'n for speaking for you. There's naught, sir," he said, in a hopeless sort of voice, as he followed Lucy out of the hut—"there's naught so mean on the face of God's earth as a jealous woman; and she"—with a jerk of his thumb over his shoulder—"is eaten alive with jealousy of the little lass's mother, though she's ben dead an' gorn out of 'er road this six year or more."

"Well,"—shrugging his shoulders—"you had better quite make her understand that I mean evewry word I say."

"I'm much obliged to you, sir," said Private Henderson, gratefully.

And that was the beginning of Lucy's acquaintance with Private Henderson's little, ill-used, worse than motherless lass Jack.

CHAPTER III.

THE steady deluge of rain was succeeded by a sharp frost, which, coming upon the world before the floods had had time to get away, turned that portion of it which has the old city of York for its center into a gigantic representation of a sugar-plum of the sort which is called crystallized. The barrack square from a swamp became a sheet of ice, and many and many a stalwart trooper of the Scarlet Lancers measured his length upon his mother earth with a sud-

denness which just left him breath enough for an invocation of the devil.

The frost was appreciated by scarcely any one in the barracks. The officers groaned over hunters eating their heads off in their stables, and chatted regretfully of the happy days gone by in field and covert; and the men for the first few hours swore right valiantly at spilled buckets of water and shins grazed against the stone steps leading to their quarters. In the married quarters those wives who were on the strength went gingerly to and fro, as a cat walks across a road full of puddles; and the only happy, really happy, souls seemed to be a group of small children huddled together under the veranda of one of the stables.

Over on the other side of the square, one or two of the men who had escaped shinning were pelting one another with snow-balls, and some of the boys were wistfully looking on, with a yearning to do likewise, which would probably end in scurrying round to some out-of-the-way part of the barracks and pelting one another till flesh and blood could bear it no longer. But the little lasses had no such ambition; for them the glories of snow-balling had no pleasure, and they huddled as closely together as they could get, and wrapped their little red sticks of arms in their pinafores, and gossiped after the pattern of their mothers, as well as their chattering teeth would let them. The chief personage of the group was Private Henderson's girl Jack.

"She'd a-been at 'er old game," she was saying, in important tones, "sending me for beer, an' father 'e don't allaow her to 'ave it, not between whiles, yer know; but mother she got low like, and sent me to get a pint, and

coming 'ome I trips over something or other and breaks the jug. And then it was all up—she wallops me like paddy-whack, and then, for fear father might see I'd a-been crying, and perhaps arsk for the jug, she turns me out. And it was awful wet that night, you know, and I was a-crying like anything, and who should come along but Capt'n Lucy."

"Oh! Capt'n Lucy," echoed the audience, pressing closer.

"And 'e 'ear me a-crying," Miss Jack proceeded, dealing out her story a sentence at a time, with a pause between each, to admit of proper and suitable ejaculations and exclamations of surprise and astonishment.

"Yes; an' 'e 'eard you!" repeated the others, in awed tones—for Captain Lucy, in common with the rest of the officers, was one of the most exalted persons in all the wide world to these little barrack bairns.

"And 'e stops, and 'e says, 'Hi!' says he, 'I say, wawt's the mat-tah?' says he."

"Wawt's the mat-tah?" murmured the group, in an absurd imitation of Lucy's drawl, which was quite free from satire, and was, indeed, spoken with a really reverential air.

"And so I told him; and then what does 'e do but just goes and hammers at our door with his whip. 'Come in,' shouts father. So the capt'n he hammers again, and out comes father *sharp;* and then the capt'n 'e just steps in and tells father all about it. Mother she tried to sneak out, but the capt'n he storps her. 'No; you won't go out, Mrs. 'Enderson,' says he; 'you'll just storp 'ere and 'ear this thwrough.'"

"Ay, and he said that!" murmured the group, many of whom had never been so fortunate as Jack—"you'll just storp 'ere and 'ear this thwrough."

Again there was the unconscious mimicry of Lucy's voice, which, blended with the half-cockney twang which obtains in barrack, had about the drollest effect in the world.

"Yes, and she 'ad to," Jack continued, in impcrtant tones; "there was no going again the capt'n, you know; and then e' says, 'Look you 'ere, Mrs. 'Enderson,' 'e says, 'if I 'ear of you a-hitting of the child again, or of turning 'er out like you did to-night, why, I'll just have you took orff the stwrength."

"He said *that!*" murmured the audience, rapturously.

"Yes, he said that, just that; an' then father 'e give it to mother proper—*proper.*"

The audience pressed nearer still to the heroine of the hour.

"What! did he wallop her?"

Jack shook her head, with its mop of dark, streaming hair. "No; father ain't one of the walloping sort; but he did give it her 'ot for all that. And he put 'er name up in the carnteen, and that was what mother dreaded more than all."

"Why?" asked the youngest of the group.

"Such a disgraice," returned Miss Jack, patly. "Ah! well, 'e's a real gentleman, is the capt'n, and I do wish that I could do something for 'im."

"Ah, yes, a real gentleman," echoed some of the others. "He was Capt'n Ferrers's chum, you know. My mother

says Captain Ferrers is the blessedest saint that ever walked the earth; and they was great chums, so they're sure to be pretty much alike."

"Yes, that's true. Ay, but he's a grander gentleman than Capt'n Ferrers was—'e talks so slow and deliberate. Capt'n Ferrers was different; 'e was sort of passionate, and once I see 'im knock a man down flat. What for? Oh, for hitting of a woman. But *my* capt'n, 'e ain't like that. Ah! I wish I was a lady; I might do something to please him then."

"Like Miss Meenon?" suggested another.

"Yes; but Miss Meenon's first there," said another, "so it's no use your troubling aught about the capt'n, Jack Henderson."

"I know that," said Jack, meekly.

It would be hard to tell how deeply had Lucy's kindly interference sunk into that child's starved and hungry heart. To be singled out by Captain Lucy, even as little Mignon, in all the beauty of her embroidered garments and the wealth of her golden hair, had been singled out years before by Captain Ferrers (for the story of Mignon's advent into the Scarlet Lancers was one well known among the barrack bairns and never likely to fade out of memory), was in itself so proud a distinction that it spoke well for the little ill-treated soul that any room was left in that untutored and ill-regulated heart for those finer feelings of gratitude and affection which may only be reasonably looked for where they have been carefully planted and assiduously cultivated.

And yet such was the passion which had taken hold of

the child's whole heart and soul, and not without good reason. Kept back by the fear of the only threat which had any real power over her mean and jealous nature, Henderson's wife had ceased her furious attacks upon her step-child. No longer was she able to beat her until in convulsions of grief, and then turn her out-of-doors to go somewhere—anywhere out of the father's sight; no longer able to rave and rant at her, or to cuff and buffet the unfortunate little proof of Henderson's love for another woman, whom she never would forgive for having been first with him, not even though she had been laid quietly out of her way six years or more. Probably no other threat in the world would have been so all-powerful as that of taking her off the strength of the regiment, for Mrs. Henderson had been a soldier's daughter; and her mother had not enjoyed the same privilege which she enjoyed as Henderson's wife. She was a clean and respectable woman enough, who did her work well, and kept her quarters in absolute cleanliness and order; but in the background there was that insatiable love for a drop of something comfortable to which Henderson so strongly objected. Likely enough it was the outcome of her early life following the drum, hanging on at the tail of a regiment, living from hand to mouth, tramping from place to place, living without meat or any comfort, and trained early to supply the place of regular and proper food, and to stay the faintness and sickly sinking of an empty stomach by what is called "a nip."

Any way, it is certain that from the hour of Lucy's interference in her behalf, little Jack Henderson—whose Christian name, by the bye, was Geraldine—enjoyed an im-

munity from that ill-usage which had been her every-day life for the past five years, and became almost a happy child. If only she could have done something for her benefactor, she would, I think, have been perfectly happy; but, poor child, she had, in determining some day or other to do him a service, set herself an almost impossible task. For what was it possible for a child in her station to do for a man in his? As a rule, the poles are not further apart than the highest and lowest classes of society in the commonwealth of a regiment. An officer knows there are so many children attached to the regiment—he often wishes there were less, particularly when such incidents happen as one of them getting run over or kicked by one of his horses, or when the question of school treats and Christmas-trees get floated by the chaplain or the most charitable lady in the regiment—he sees them *en masse* in church and school, and individually or in small groups in various parts of the square at other times. But as for knowing any one of them apart from any of the others, or taking the very smallest interest in them personally, why, it is simply a thing unheard of and unthought of.

And yet this little barrack bairn, by that one act of kindly interference, had been lifted out of the common run of her fellows, had been lifted altogether out of herself, and filled with a wild dream of ambitious delight that, sooner or later, she would do something for Captain Lucy. But the question was, what should she, or rather what *could* she, do? In her ignorant but grateful heart she cast about to think what the something had best be. Poor child, she thought and thought, and then she sighed to

think how much less she knew and could do than others among her fellows. If she were like Polly Armstrong, and could crochet, why, she might make the captain a beautiful antimacassar for his sitting-room. That would be something like a present to give him, and, fired by the constant presence of an elegant specimen of those articles of luxury which covered the little round table in the window of their quarters, and by the remembrance of several superelegant ones which were put away "for best," and only brought to show admiring visitors, or to be used on extra grand occasions, Miss Jack coaxed a penny out of her father, and, with a bent crochet hook belonging to Polly Armstrong, began, under that damsel's tuition, an antimacassar for the ultimate adornment of Captain Lucy's quarters.

For weeks afterward that, to her, herculean task was the effort of her daily life. Never, surely, was such a labor of love undertaken and completed under circumstances so adverse and so trying. In the first place, it was no easy matter for a little girl, who was obliged to keep the whole affair a profound secret at home, to obtain the few pence necessary for the purchase of the cotton with which to make the thing; and then, being obliged to keep it a secret, she was not able to work at it, with her little cramped and unaccustomed fingers, during the long evening hours between dusk and bed-time. Therefore it had all to be done during odd moments and in odd and out-of-the-way corners—sitting on the cold and damp steps leading to the troop-rooms, hiding behind stables or riding-school, only working in comfort on those rare occasions when "mother" was out on a shopping or visiting expedition, or when Polly Arm-

strong's mother would let Polly bring her into their quarters to tea. At other times the whole thing reposed in Jack's not too clean or inviting pocket, along with a bit of slate-pencil, two bits of twine, a brass thimble, and a little comb, a Christmas card, and part of a stick of Spanish juice, to the imminent danger of the hook running into her leg, and having to be cut out thereof with the aid of a knife.

But at last, in spite of all let and hinderance, it was finished, and a real antimacassar lay upon the topmost step of the flight of stairs which led to the school-room, carefully spread upon an old newspaper. Four or five admiring girls of different ages stood by, while Polly Armstrong smoothed out the fringe with the proud consciousness of being the master-hand, and Jack Henderson gazed at her completed task with shining eyes of rapture. At last she had done something for her captain!

And there, in the midst of the group, lay the work of gratitude, the offering of a thankful heart. The fastidious and those hard to please might have scoffed at it, for it was not very large, nor yet very well done as a specimen of crochet-work. How should it be? Nor yet was it very clean; in fact, it was decidedly dirty, showing plainly enough which of the dragged and irregularly made circles had been added last, as plainly which had been done the first; while the fringe, having been put on last of all, was quite lily-white by comparison with the dinginess of the whole.

But in Jack Henderson's eyes it was without flaw. Polly Armstrong had told her that crochet-work should never be washed before being given away, so she took no heed of the

difference of tone which it presented, and beyond it had but one thought: How should she contrive to get it into Captain Lucy's quarters?

CHAPTER IV.

"MY OWN WORK."

Our little lives are kept in equipoise
By opposite attractions and desires;
The struggle of the instinct that enjoys,
And the more noble instinct that aspires.

Haunted Houses.

ALTHOUGH there was not a single practical one among them, at least a dozen ways suggested themselves to little Jack Henderson's mind by which the antimacassar might be smuggled into Captain Lucy's quarters.

First she might give it to his servant and ask him to lay it on the table; but then Jack had but a very small opinion of barrack-room honor, and in her own mind did not hesitate in thinking that he would not only open the parcel and inspect the contents, but would also be pretty certain to spread the story of her gift to the captain from one end of the regiment to the other, by way of repeating the last good thing in barrack gossip. No, almost as soon as the idea presented itself to her she made up her mind that it would not be the least use in thinking of that means of getting at the captain. She must hit upon some other. Now how would it be to seek out his laundress and get her to include it amongst his clean linen? No, that was quite impracticable also, for Jack felt perfectly certain that Mrs.

Simmonds would insist upon washing it first—and, of course, if she went to ask her such a favor she could not do less than give her a sight of the contents of the parcel. It would never do to have it washed, for Polly Armstrong was most positive in declaring that such a thing was never done. So it was evident that it was no use thinking of Mrs. Simmonds as a means to the end which she had in view.

Then there was Mrs. Brett, who kept the captain's quarters in order—how would she do? Well, she might and probably would manage it for her, only Mrs. Brett had such a very long tongue, and was, moreover, such a friend of Mrs. Henderson's, that Jack felt she might just as well tell that good lady all about it straightway, for before a couple of hours had passed she knew Mrs. Brett would have done so; and such was Jack's wholesome dread of her stepmother's scathing tongue (to say nothing of her heavy hand), that rather than let a breath of her doings reach her ears, she would submit to anything, almost to being flayed alive.

No, she must think of some other way—Cooper wouldn't do, and Mrs. Simmonds wouldn't do, and Mrs. Brett wouldn't do either. She must think of some other way.

"Why," suggested Polly Armstrong, who had nerves of brass and the assurance of the old gentleman himself—"why don't you wait about till the capt'n comes by, and give it 'im yerself?"

Jack stared at her with wide-open eyes of horror.

"I dursn't do such a thing," she cried.

"Why not? The capt'n wouldn't eat you; most folks are too pleased to get things given 'em, to mind being

stopped a minute. That's what I should do—jest you wait about for him, Jack Henderson, afore dinner-time. That'll be the best time to catch him—jest when he's going to dress for mess; that's the time for you—it won't do to speak to him when he's in uniform, 'cause he won't 'ave no money on him then.''

"Money!" gasped Jack.

"Yes, of course," returned Polly, who was an intensely practical young person, as practical as she was bold—"'e can't do less than tip you a bob for it! Why, it's a real beauty!"

"Tip me a bob!" repeated poor Jack, the ready tears springing to her big black eyes. "I don't want no bob, Polly Armstrong—I did it for 'im! It's *a present!*''

"Oh! well, if you're so 'igh and mighty, Jack Henderson, jest go your own way," returned the older girl, rather contemptuously; "I only know what *I* should do if I was you. But that don't matter to me. Any way, it'll 'ave to be made into a parcel, and I've saved a bit of nice paper for you, with a bit of tissue to put inside; 'ave you got any string?''

Yes, Jack had string, string which had been reposing in her pocket for three weeks past. So Polly—after they had each taken a last fond look at the treasure, much as (and quite as gravely) one takes a last look of one's dead—coffined it in the two sheets of paper, and together they tied up the parcel with Jack's bits of string.

"Now you'll have to write the address yourself," said Polly; "I'll fetch father's pen and ink.''

It happened that afternoon that Mrs. Armstrong had let

Polly bring her friend to tea, and had herself gone into the city with Armstrong to do various catering for the sergeants' mess, which they "ran." So the two girls were alone; and Jack was able to make her arrangements and accomplish the task of putting a suitable superscription upon the parcel in peace and comfort, and without the slightest fear of any interruption. They had an anxious consultation as to the terms in which it should be couched, and this was the result—a result which Jack accomplished after a considerable amount of nervous care had been expended, and she had not a few times started again and begun at the beginning:

"*To Captain Lucy, with greatful love, from Jack.*"

She gazed at it for a moment with the same look of rapture with which she had contemplated the completed labor of love which now lay snugly within the brown-paper cover; then with a burst of pride, and without consulting Polly Armstrong, or saying a single word, she wrote below:

"*My own Work.*"

And then she gave a great sigh, and looked deprecatingly at Polly for a word of approbation.

Now Polly was Jack's great friend, and was, moreover, sympathy itself; but Polly was only human, and she repeated the three words twice over in a very grave and judicial tone.

"My *hown* work," she said—"my *hown* work. Ah! an' he'll never know as 'twas I showed you how to do it all."

Impulsive Jack threw her arms round her friend's neck. "I'll tell 'im, Polly!" she cried.

"What, if you daren't wait and speak to 'im?" asked Polly, swallowing her feelings and trying to smile. "Nay, never mind, Jack; I did it for you, not for the capt'n."

But still they had not yet decided how Jack was to get the parcel conveyed into the captain's presence.

At last, however, Polly Armstrong hit upon a plan which, though it sounded a very desperate one, commended itself to them both as being really feasible. It was for Jack to steal like a little ghost into Captain Lucy's quarters, lay the parcel on a conspicuous part of the table, and come away as quietly as she had gone.

"Supposing he was to catch me?" Jack gasped.

"But you must go when we know 'e's out," answered the practical Polly. "And even if 'e did happen to run against you, why, as I said before, Jack, 'e won't *eat* you."

"No; but—oh, lor'! supposing Cooper should be about?"

"Cooper won't be about at tea-time—trust 'im to be looking after 'isself then," retorted Polly.

"Or Mrs. Brett?" Jack suggested.

"She's never about 'er orfficers' rooms at that time," Polly cried.

"But I don't know which is the room," urged Jack, as a last feeble protest against the plan which common-sense told her was the best she could follow.

"Oh, that don't matter. I've been in with Mrs. Brett, so I can show you exactly," was Polly's prompt reply.

Jack drew a long breath, fixed her big eyes upon her companion, clasped her little red frost-roughened hands to-

gether against her breast, and then took a desperate resolve.

"Polly," she said, "I'll do it."

CHAPTER V.

THE RECTOR OF FERRERS.

This song of mine
Is a song of the vine
To be sung by the glowing embers
Of way-side inns,
When the rain begins
To darken the drear Novembers.

Catawba Wine.

THE frost had gone long ago, and hunting was on its last legs, for February had taken its sodden self away, and March had come bustling in like a new maid-of-all-work hired for a month on trial. And like that very trying person, who generally begins to show signs of wearing out by the end of the month, so March had, after a fair dose of the "mucking it out" process, settled down to the almost inevitable proceeding of going out like a lamb.

Leave was over, and the regiment was fairly at work, the drill season having begun; but Lucy had been so lucky and privileged as to get a week's leave, which he had spent at Ferrers Court with his old chum Bootles. Therefore—the memory of one Bootles being still cherished among the Scarlet Lancers—his appearance, when he walked into the anteroom, was hailed with more interest than was usual with such of the officers as were gathered there, idling over sherry or tea, discussing the day's run with those who had

been out with the hounds, or hearing the very last little bit of regimental gossip.

"Why, here's Lucy! Well, old man, how are you? How did you leave them all at Ferrers Court?"

"Did you have a good time, Lucy?" asked another.

"Very good, thanks. I left 'em all pwretty fit, I think. Old Bootles sent his best wrespects to you all."

"Thanks"—from one or two voices.

"And how is the old chap?" asked Preston.

"Oh, awfully well! By the bye, he's getting fat."

"No!"

"Fact—I assure you. Twruth is, the fellow's too twremendously happy. It's vewry nice to be happy, of course, but it plays the vewry devil with one's looks," Lucy answered. "Bootles don't seem to mind much—says it's a bore as wregards his mounts, but otherwise so long as he don't get bald he won't care a little hang."

"And is he getting bald?"

"Didn't see any sign of it."

"And Mrs. Bootles—how is she getting on?"

"She's pwrettier than ever," asserted Lucy.

"By Jove! And the baby?" some one asked.

"Oh, the baby is flouwrishing. Scarcely so quick as Mignon was, and vewry shy, but says 'mam—mam—mam,' and—er—cwrawls about all over the place."

"And Mignon?" asked Miles.

Lucy laughed. "Oh! Mignon has grown—er—nearly two inches!—says she's almost big enough to be marwried now."

"She still sticks to her determination?"

"Oh, yes!—still declares that her faithful Lal is her final choice. I wrepwresented to her that she can't possibly be marwried for at least six years, and that in six—er—years I may be bald; but it was all no go."

"Mignon doesn't mind baldness, eh? You are getting thin on the top, you know, Lucy," laughed Miles.

Lucy smoothed the top of his head gingerly.

"Yes, I'm afwraid you're wright, Miles—I shall be as bald as old Garnet by the time Mignon is sixteen. Mignon is vewry philosophical; she—er—says I can get a wig. I wonder," he added, reflectively, amid a yell of laughter from his audience, and with a serenely contemplative stare into the glass above the chimney-shelf—"I wonder how I should look in a wig?"

"That would depend on the color a good deal," cried Power, gravely.

"Yes; that—er—is so, certainly," responded Lucy. "I wreally think I should have an assortment. One might change about, you know, in a vewry comfortable sort of—er—mannah! By the bye, Bwrandon is an awful success at Ferwrers's place."

"Dear old chap, you don't say so! Ah! Bootles was always partial to Brandon," chimed in Garnet, no longer "Old Garnet," but junior colonel, and as well off as anybody.

"Yes, quite a success," repeated Lucy.

Mr. Brandon had been chaplain to the forces when the Scarlet Lancers were quartered at Blankhampton ten years previously, and Bootles, when the very good living of Ferrers fell vacant, had offered it to him, by whom it had been accepted. Naturally enough there had been some

doubts expressed as to whether an army chaplain—and a jovial soul into the bargain—was quite the best man in the world to put in charge of a quiet country parish. But Mr. Brandon had grown not a little weary of moving about the face of the earth, and had settled down with thorough content as Rector of Ferrers, with Bootles for his squire; and after a very few weeks the parish of Ferrers had accepted him with equal contentment.

"Such a joke!" Lucy went on, in his placid drawl; "a chap came to dinner the—er—other night; chap something after—the—er—colonel's style. I named him—er—the pump—goes in devilish hot for—ah—teetotalism—*he* calls it tempewrance. Well, this beggar wregularly wrounded on Bwrandon for taking wine at dinner; told him he wasn't doing what he was—er—pleased to call 'the Lurd's work;' said that he'd heard that he pwreached in the cause of dwrink. Bwrandon said he wasn't awawre of it.

"'I heard you, sir—*my—self*,' said the other, waving his glass of water to and fwro in a way which made one twremble for Mrs. Bootles's fwrock, 'say—in—the—pulpit, that thewre was no harm in a man having his pint of beer a day, or his two or thwree glasses of wine, according to his means.'

"'Oh, yes!' said Bwrandon—'I don't deny that for a moment.'

"'Do you call that doing the Lurd's work?' cwried the pump.

"'Yes, I do,' answered Bwrandon, coolly.

"'Then let me tell you, sir, that you pwreach neither tempewrance nor the Gospel.'

"'Oh, yes, I do,' said Bwrandon, mildly; 'but, you see, I don't pwreach the Gospel according to tempewrance, but tempewrance according to the Gospel.'"

"No—you don't mean it! Did Brandon really say that?" cried old Garnet—I beg his pardon, *Colonel* Garnet.

"Yes—wreally and twruly! The pump looked so awfully sold—so he abwruptly changed the subject, and began a heated discussion on the mewrits and demewrits of school-masters as bishops; he argued and argued that men who had been head-masters of public schools were always bullies, and were not fit to be bishops, until at last poor old Bwrandon, who didn't agwree with him, seemed to get a bit bored.

"'Well,' said he, 'the fact is thewre's a good deal of cwrude lay opinion floating about, and by and by it'll get educated, and then we shall be all wright.' Oh! old Bwrandon's the wright man in the wright place at Ferwrers, no mistake about it!"

"And what did old Bootles say to the discussion?" asked Miles, calling to mind some sentiments expressed by their old comrade in the days gone by.

"Why, Bootles didn't say much, scarcely anything, in fact," answered Lucy. "But he turned wround to Bwrown—yes, Bwrown's with him still—and said, 'Bwrown, take champagne to Mr. Bwrandon.' I took that as pwretty conclusive evidence as to what old Bootles *thought*," Lucy wound up, amid the laughter of his hearers.

"By the bye," he began again presently, "Bootles and his wife are going to the States."

"The States! What to do there?" asked Power.

"Oh! only for a twrip, I think."

"And the baby?"

"Oh! it's going, too. But Mignon's not going."

"Mignon—not going!"

"No; the child's such a wretched sailor; so she's coming to pay us a long visit instead."

"How jolly! Quite like old times!" cried several of Mignon's old adorers in the same breath.

"Yes—well, I must be off—got some letters to—er—write before dinner."

Lucy was the only one who left the warm and well-lighted anteroom, and as he shut the door the babel of voices rose again with just the same buzzing noise as before.

Having turned his back upon it, Lucy sought his own quarters in the main block of buildings set apart for the use of the officers, went quietly in at the front door, up the center stairs, and turned sharply into his sitting-room. And behold there in the very middle of the hearth-rug—having just put her precious parcel in the center of the round table—stood, with her big eyes wide open with fright, with her dark hair streaming wildly about her, and with a vivid scarlet streak upon either cheek, Jack!

CHAPTER VI.

BITTER-SWEET.

A feeling of sadness and longing,
That is not akin to pain,
And resembles sorrow only
As the mist resembles the rain.
The Day is Done.

WITHOUT doubt the child looked the guiltiest thing alive, and it is impossible for any one greatly to blame Lucy when I tell them that his first thought was that he had caught her stealing, or intending to steal, something.

"Hello!" he exclaimed. "Who are you? What are you doing in my quarters?"

Jack turned her head from side to side, just as a strange cat does when it is meditating a spring out of your arms after you have captured it.

Lucy promptly caught her by the arm. "Come, tell me what you're doing in my wrooms."

"I didn't come to do no harm," she gasped out.

"No? Then tell me your name," he said, pitying her agony of agitation.

This was too much! To think that *her* capt'n, of whom she had thought and dreamed, whom she had worshiped morning, noon, and night for weeks past, should actually meet her face to face and not know her again! Poor little girl, it was the most bitter pang that had ever torn her heart in twain. She tried to speak, but only suc-

ceeded in catching her breath in one great convulsive sob which shook her slight shrinking frame in a way which would have made a harder heart than Lucy's ache; and then she drooped her head with all its black streaming hair on to her hands, and broke out into passionate weeping.

Lucy was beside himself; it pained him to see this torrent of grief, and yet he was not inclined to let the intruder go without telling her name or what she wanted there. But plainly it was no use attempting to make her speak until the violence of her sobs and tears had somewhat abated. And then his eyes fell upon the brown paper parcel lying in the middle of the round table at the side of the room. It was something in the shape of it, and a certain want of neatness about the direction written on a piece of ordinary white paper which had been gummed in its place, which made him look at it closely, as if it might help him to solve the mystery of the little girl's appearance in his quarters; and with astonished eyes he read his name upon it:

To Captain Lucy, with greatful love

from Jack.

My own Work.

Lucy stared at it in great surprise for a moment, then turned back to the child. "Why," he exclaimed, "you must be Henderson's little girl. Did you come in to bwring me a pwresent?"

"Yes"—in a choking voice; then, with a louder sob than ever, forced out: "And you didn't even know me again!"

"I'm vewry sorwry," said Lucy, in his kindest tones—"I'm vewry sorwry, but you must wremember that I see a good many little girls, and that it was quite dark when I saw you. But I shall know you another time, never fear! What is your name, eh?"

"Jack," answered the child, wiping her eyes vigorously with her scarlet knuckles.

"Jack! That's a vewry stwrange name for a girl, isn't it?"

Miss Henderson heaved a vast sigh, the last token of her storm of grief. "Please, sir, father 'e calls me Jack, cause he'd 'ave liked a boy instead of me. But my right name is Geraldine."

"Ah! your wright name is Gewraldine, is it? and a vewry nice name it is. And—er—how are you getting on, eh? Been turned out in the wrain again?"

Jack shook her head. "No, sir;" then added, in an impressive voice, "And I don't believe as I shall ever be turned out no more."

"No?—how's that?"

"Father—'e put mother's name up in the carnteen; he's threatened it often enough before, but 'e's done it at last."

"Ah! Well"—after a pause—"I'm glad you're let alone now. And am I to see what this pwresent is you've been doing for me?"

Jack turned suddenly shy. "Please, sir, I'd like to go."

"Oh! I must see first," he answered. "There's no hurwry."

Lucy knew well enough that the child was in reality, no

matter how much shyness she displayed, burning with pride, and, with the kindness to anything helpless or weak which was one of his greatest charms, he stayed her departure and cut the string in several places. He little knew it, but that careless severing of the precious twine sent a sharp pang through Jack's heart.

He opened the parcel and undid the outer covering; then opened the sheet of tissue-paper, and beheld— Well, for a moment he would have given worlds to laugh; the next, he was only possessed by an intense desire to hide what he thought from the child's keen, anxious eyes.

"De-ah me!" said he, taking up the square of crochet-work and spreading it upon the dark-blue cloth which covered the table; "that's—er—aw—fully pwretty, Jack. And you did it yourself?"

"All myself," said Jack, gazing proudly at her handiwork; "but Polly Armstrong, she showed me 'ow to do it."

"I'm sure I'm vewry much obliged to you, Jack," said Lucy, wondering how he should contrive to say just the right thing and avoid hurting the child's feelings. "You're a vewry good little girl, Jack, and must tell me where to put it."

He told himself that this was a good idea, and would help him out of a difficulty nicely. It was a very important decision for Jack, and she looked round with big solemn eyes.

"It might go on that chair, sir," she said, pointing at the only chair in the room which had a back suitable for the display of crochet-work, "or, if you liked, it might 'ang on the torp of the glass there."

"Ah, ye—es, on the top of the looking-glass," repeated Lucy, vaguely.

"Or you could put it on the torp of this little taible," Jack went on volubly. "And then you could stand a vawse on it, or the Bible."

Lucy looked round more vaguely still. "Aw, a vase, or a Bible. Aw—wouldn't an album do nearly as well?"

"Jest the same, sir," cried Jack, eagerly.

It was evident that she meant to stay and see the arrangement carried into effect, so Lucy brought a photograph book, and, after the child had with much care and setting straight and patting into shape laid the antimacassar on the middle of a little round gypsy table, set it thereon.

"It's vewry nice, and I shall always pwrize it," he told her. "And now you must go and buy yourself some sweeties."

He put two bright half-crowns into her hand, and Jack felt herself dismissed.

"I didn't want no money—" she began.

"Oh, no; but you will be able to buy yourself sweeties, or anything."

She knew by his tone that it was no use going against him, so she edged away to the door, with a shy "Thank you, sir," and then asked a question.

"Please, sir, may I give one of these to Polly Armstrong?"

Lucy looked at her. "Who is she?"

"Please, sir, the girl what showed me—"

"Oh, yes, yes, I wremember; to be sure; do what you like with them. Good-bye, Jack, and many tha—nks."

So Jack went away, her heart beating wildly, her cheeks flushed, her eyes shining with pride and pleasure. Outside the officers' quarters she found Polly Armstrong awaiting her with an anxious face.

"What a time you 'ave been, Jack!" she burst out.

Jack lifted her face radiant with joy, and pushed the masses of her straight black hair away from it, but she did not speak.

"Is it all right? Did any one see you?" Polly asked.

"*He* did," said Jack, impressively.

"*What!* Captain Lucy?" cried Polly, in tones of genuine horror.

Jack nodded. "Yes, the capt'n. I left you, you know, Polly," she said, suddenly dropping her mysterious air and tone, and settling herself down for a comfortable cozy gossip of the most confidential kind, "and I sneaked up the stairs and listened. Well, I 'adn't been there a minute 'fore I see Cooper come out and go across the passage in the room opposite. In a minute more he come back again, and goes back into the capt'n's quarters. So I jest waited, and by 'n bye out 'e comes, and goes away by the other stairs a-whistling with his 'ands in his pockets. Now's my chance, I thinks, so I jest popped in and pushed the door open. Well, I put the parcel in the middle of the taible, and then I thinks, well, there ain't no 'arm in jest looking raound, when I 'ear a step outside, and in bounces—the capt'n."

"Oh, my!" exclaimed Polly Armstrong, with a shiver. "And what then?"

"Oh! the capt'n, 'e says, 'Hillo,' says 'e—' what the

devil do you want?' and then he catches sight of the parcel on the taible, and 'e says, 'Why, you're 'Enderson's girl Jack! And what's this?' 'e says—' 'ave you been bwringing me a pwresent?' And then, of course, he opens it, and was as pleased as pleased over it. And 'e put it on a little raound taible, and sets a big green and gold halbum on it, and then 'e give me these 'ere "—at this point Jack opened her hand and displayed the two shining half-crowns. "One's for you," said she, as Polly uttered an exclamation of surprise.

"Did the capt'n say so?" she asked, eagerly.

Jack shook her head. "No; 'e said I was to do jest what I liked with 'em—but, Polly, I told 'im as 'twas you showed me 'ow to do it."

"You did?" cried Polly, with bated breath.

"I did," asserted Jack.

"And what did the capt'n say to that?"

"Well, 'e didn't say nothing," returned Jack, with unconscious, but none the less for that, crushing plainness.

Polly had to swallow her disappointment as best she could, and she did it bravely. She knew that it was not given to every boy or girl in barracks to come so immediately under the notice of one of the officers as Jack Henderson had had the good luck to do; and then, doubtless, the sharp edge was rather taken off the slight by the sight of the solid, substantial half-crowns in Jack's hand.

"I told the capt'n I should give one to you, Polly," Jack continued, "and 'e said, 'All wright,' said 'e, 'do jest what you like.'"

So Polly Armstrong took the half-crown with many expressions of gratitude, for half-crowns are not every-day matters among children in barracks; and from that moment she took also an inferior position in the intercourse between the two girls, not unnaturally, for Jack was on all occasions able to quote her capt'n as a good and sufficient reason for being put always at the top of the tree. In fact Polly only saved herself from a state of abject slavery by putting one more question to Jack on the subject of her adventure.

"Jack," she said, abruptly, "did you courtesy to the capt'n when you came away?"

"No!" faltered Jack, in a very small voice.

"Then," retorted Polly, with crushing emphasis, "he would think as you hadn't no manners."

Poor Jack's heart seemed to turn to water within her. She felt undone—crushed—abject. Oh! to think she should go and spoil all by such a thing as that!

But when she began to feel a little less "squashed," she began also to congratulate herself on having kept a little of her interview with Captain Lucy to herself. She had not intended to be in any way deceitful or not to fully confide in Polly, but when it came to repeating the interview word for word, well, it was not unnatural that she should hesitate to recount what had been so bitter a pang for her. In her excitement she gave Polly the agreeable part of the scene, and just let that which was not agreeable slide away into the very deepest recesses of her memory.

But she took warning by Polly's question, and—to Lucy's intense dismay—began a course of courtesying which very

soon made him dread the mere sight of the child. For wherever he was, and whoever he was with, there, sooner or later, appeared Henderson's little girl Jack; and no sooner did Jack catch sight of him than she proceeded at once to shorten her slim little person to about half its natural height by means of a sudden dexterous dip.

How Lucy got to dread those dips!

But he had to endure them, and the unmerciful chaff which came in their train.

"I say, Lucy, what's the meaning of all the brats in barracks making bob-courtesies to you?" asked Garnet one day, when Jack had executed a solemn salute, on passing several officers, of whom her capt'n was one.

Lucy—as he afterward said like a fool—explained it in his own graphic manner.

"The fa—ct is," he said, "I saved Pwrivate Henderson's little girl from his bwrute of a wife—the child's stepmother that is; the bwrute had beaten her for her own fault and turned the poor little wretch out into the pouring wrain—pwrobably thought she'd get rid of the poor little devil. Well, I just went in and—er—put a stop to it; told the bwrute if it occurred again I'd—er—have her taken off the stwrength at once. That's all. I suppose the poor little beg—gar finds life more endurable, and the bob-courtesy is the—er—wresult."

"Poor little devil!" said Garnet. "Some of these youngsters get the life of—well! well! I'm glad you stopped it; Henderson's wife is, as you say, a regular brute."

"But," struck in Miles, "only think of old Lucy suddenly starting a crusade of that kind! I thought that sort

of thing was altogether out of your line, old fellow. I don't think I'd go in for it, if I were you, Lucy—not at your time of life and with your proclivities—I wouldn't really. It don't seem to fit in with you somehow!"

"Er—don't worwry yourself about it," returned Lucy, sweetly.

"You're not going to take a class in the Sunday-school, are you?" Miles persisted.

"Might do worse," returned Lucy, in his most imperturbable manner, but with a heart brimful and running over with intense disgust.

"Oh, lor'! Have you ever been to a Sunday-school?"

"Nev—ah!" with emphasis.

"Ah! well—*I* have I was once awfully in love with a girl—engaged to her, too, by Jove! She was pretty and rich and nice—but she was *good*. I couldn't stand that, somehow."

"I can quite understand *that*," put in Garnet.

"Yes, colonel, I've no doubt—but this girl was very good. Thought it wicked to look at a novel on Sunday; worse to play more than a hymn on a piano. I don't like hymns on a piano," Miles continued, reflectively; "I like 'em in church with a good congregation. But this girl was very good—came of a high-minded family."

"Then she wouldn't suit you," said Lucy, dryly.

"You're right, Lucy; she didn't; and her people suited me less. I remember once coming home from church with a very high-minded young brother of hers, who told me in a pompous tone of rebuke that it was bad to indulge in frivolous conversation while on the way home from church

—*he* knew some people who never uttered a word until after they had reached their own homes."

"What did you say to that, Miles?" asked Power.

"Me? I said 'Oh!'"

"Where's the point of the stowry?" asked Lucy, plaintively.

"It's to come—that day it came a minute after I said 'Oh!' for this joker happened to hit his foot rather a crack against a big stone. 'Damn the stone!' said he; then looked at me and said: 'Oh! I beg your pardon.' 'Not at all, my dear chap,' said I; 'I don't mind at all—in fact, I rather like it.'

"Oh!" he continued, shaking his head—"they were quite too holy a set for me. And somehow that sort of thing seems to suit old Lucy just about as well as it suited me."

CHAPTER VII.

MEG MERRILIES.

Till at length the burden seems
Greater than our strength can bear;
Heavy as the weight of dreams,
Pressing on us everywhere.
Something left Undone.

THE two rooms which constituted Lucy's quarters were about the best "got up" of any in the barracks. They were not extravagant nor yet foolish, but they were comfortable and pretty. A good Wilton carpet covered the floor of the sitting-room, and a good blue cloth, with a line

of gold round the edge thereof and a charming monogram in gold at one corner, covered the table; the floor had been stained and varnished, and the top of the table was a packing-case into which fitted very indifferent mahogany legs, but the effect of the whole was very good. There was a pretty velvet-covered over-mantel arrangement on which was displayed a good collection of war medals and decorations, and some dozen or so of good miniatures; and there were eight or ten photographs in velvet frames also—one of Lucy's sister, Mrs. Arkwright; one of his old chum, Algernon Ferrers, better known as Bootles; one of his wife —Mrs. Ferrers, that is; and the largest and best of all, a beautiful portrait on porcelain of his little sweetheart, Mignon. And there one soft April morning stood Lucy himself, his eyes fixed on the great fire roaring as fires in barracks generally do, half way up the chimney, his face clouded with vexation, his brows drawn together, and his whole air one of intense annoyance. Truth to tell, Lucy had never been more heartily disgusted in his life than he was at that moment, and the cause of it was the poor little barrack bairn who was called Jack Henderson. For Lucy, coming from the office in all the glory of a gold-laced shell-jacket and a silver-mounted riding-whip, had seen what he called "that dwreadful child" flying toward him from afar, her thin arms and legs revolving very much like the sails of a windmill gone wrong in its mind, her long lank black hair floating on the breeze, and her face full of excitement lest she should miss the chance of saluting "her capt'n" with the usual bob-courtesy.

Now between him and the child stood Garnet, Preston,

and Miles in a group; so without a moment's hesitation Lucy just turned tail and bolted, but, worse luck, not before the group of three had seen something of which they made an immense joke, and which was funny enough to cause a right royal shout to ring out over the square; it was ringing in Lucy's ears at that moment.

"It's the vewry devil!" Lucy exclaimed, as he banged the door behind him; "enough to make a man wrepent of having ever done anything for anybody. 'Pon my soul, that child is getting a perfect curse to me; if it goes on much further, why, deuce take it! I shall have to exchange, 'pon my soul I shall."

Of course it would have been a very simple way out of the annoyance, and one in which most men would have taken refuge, to stop the child one day and say, "Hi, little girl, don't make that courtesy whenever and wherever you happen to meet me." In truth, he had thought of it more than once, but his was a nature which shrunk from inflicting pain upon the hearts of anything beneath him; though, as his brother officers could testify, to his equals Lucy was often as merciless as steel, cold steel.

Well, it was certain he could not stay in his quarters all the day, so he pulled himself together and went to lunch, for which the bugle had just sounded. And as soon as he showed his face within the mess-room he realized that he was in for an unusually severe storm of chaff.

"Here he is!" exclaimed one.

"Why, *Lucy!*" cried another.

Lucy put on his armor of sweet serenity.

"Eh?" he asked, placidly.

"Eh!" repeated Preston. "Well, I like that."

"Why?" Lucy asked, in his mildest tone.

"Why? Well, why did you turn tail and bolt just now?" Preston persisted, amid the laughter of a dozen officers.

Lucy's face was a perfect picture of bewildered innocence. "Why, Pwreston," he exclaimed, "what on earth are you talking about."

"It was the finest thing," Miles struck in, unable to keep out of the conversation any longer. "Preston and I were talking to old Garnet over there"—jerking his thumb over in the direction of the stables to the right of the square—"when old Lucy came out of the office, looking as trim as a yacht going for the Queen's prize at Cowes. By Jove, he'd got his best jacket on to-day, and the sun was shining on his bright boots and on the mountings of his whip, till, 'pon my word, he looked like the Mikado of Japan, or something equally grand and gorgeous. Well, he was coming sailing down the square, when suddenly that little Meg Merrilies who's always running after him caught a glimpse of him, and set off at a sling trot in a slanting direction across the green so as to catch him before he got to us. Well, as soon as old Lucy saw her he simply turned tail and bolted off in the direction of his own stables. For a minute Meg was baffled, and then she threw her head up with a yelp and gave chase. 'Pon my soul," Miles ended, "to see that little imp chasing Lucy across the square was the funniest thing that has come in my way for years."

"Oh! vewry funny," laughed Lucy. "Poor old Miles always has the best jokes in the world. But somehow nobody seems to wrelish them quite so much as he does him-

self. Now, if you fellows wreally want to hear a decent joke I can tell you one.''

"Go on," shouted half a dozen voices together.

"I met Home of the White Horse the other day when I was in town," Lucy began, thus encouraged to tell his little tale, "who told me that the Wroyal Horse are having a fancy ball next month at Warnecliffe. Seems there's a man in the Wroyal Horse called Vansittart—vewry dirty chap.''

"Yes, 'Dirty Van,'" cried Power. "We know. Go on."

"This chap asked Cwritchley—Major, you know—the other day, what chawracter he would advise him to take for it.

"'Why, my de—ah chap,' said Cwritchley, 'go in a clean shirt—*nobody'd know you.*'"

"By Jove! I wonder how D.V. liked *that?*" exclaimed Power. "I know the beggar well; was at Charterhouse with him. And he was a dirty brute, no mistake about it. I remember once old Bootles was asked to stop at a big house in Yorkshire. 'Come to us on the 3d, dear Captain Ferrers,' said the hostess. 'I'm afraid I have to go to Mountjoy on the 4th,' said Bootles. 'You couldn't do with me a couple of days earlier, could you, Lady Gwendolyn?' 'I'm very much afraid I *can not* manage it,' said Lady Gwendolyn, 'for the house is *full*, quite full; and the first who goes is Mr. Vansittart, on the morning of the 3d.' 'Oh! Van goes then, does he, Lady Gwendolyn?' returned Bootles, coolly. 'Well, if you don't mind, if I've got to sleep in a room after Van, *I'd rather have somebody in be-*

tween,' and old Bootles went gayly off to Mountjoy, and stayed there a fortnight."

In this way the tide of chaff was turned away from Lucy on to the unfortunate Vansittart of the Royal Horse, and Lucy was able to breathe in peace during the rest of luncheon-time. But before the day was over they were at him again, for unfortunately he walked down to the club in company with Colonel Garnet and Power, and when passing over Castle Mills Bridge came upon the luckless Jack, who was sitting on the parapet thereof, in company with half a dozen other barrack bairns. When Lucy caught sight of the great black eyes and dark streaming hair of the child whom he had befriended, he turned his head sharply in the other direction, and became all at once very deeply and intensely interested in the great pile of buildings which raise their roofs above the castle wall.

But in vain. No sooner did Jack see him than she slipped off the parapet and began executing a series of wild courtesies, in which circumstances she looked—as she stood in the midst of a row of children—just like one of those little wooden doll-looking things which you find inside a piano, and which bob up and down as you touch the keys.

Of course neither old Garnet—I call him in the old familiar way, as in the days when he couldn't get promotion, and used to be told by the cheeky young subalterns, "Never mind, Mr. Garnet, never you mind, Mr. Garnet, sir, you'll soon be dead, and then you'll be as well off as any of 'em"—nor Power could spare Lucy the infliction of this little comedy, therefore they promptly and simultane-

ously woke him up by a sharp application of their elbows on either side of him; and as with the best intentions in the wide world and the most stoical indifference to suffering you *can not* withstand more than a certain amount of elbows prodded violently into your ribs, Lucy was obliged to withdraw his interest from the castle and apparently wake up to a realization of passing events; and no sooner did he turn his head toward the row of barrack bairns than they one and all—the others doubtless fired by the brilliant example of Jack—began the same little piano-dolly style of performance as Jack had initiated.

"Aw! How d' do?" returned Lucy in answer, fluttered perhaps for the first time in his life.

Dip—dip—dip—went the half-dozen shabby little figures again, while radiant smiles lighted up all the little faces.

"How d' do? How d' do?" said Lucy again, and stalked on, groaning in the spirit and heartily cursing the day that fate ever led him into Jack Henderson's path. The others were highly elated.

"Why, bless me, Lucy"—began old Garnet, in an unctuous kind of tone—"it's growing quite interesting to walk down the street with you."

"Like a royal progress," struck in Power.

"Ah!" murmured Lucy, finding that they paused, apparently for him to reply.

"Is that your Sunday-school class?" old Garnet asked, in the mild tone of one really anxious for information.

"You remind me of old—er—" struck in Power, without giving Lucy time to speak—"old—er—yes, what d'ye call him—the—er—fellow who had so many youngsters—

old—er—why, bless me, you begin to look the part already —like—er—"

"The devil between two sticks?" suggested Lucy, gently, and with a quiet laugh. "I say, you fellows, it's all very funny, I know, but I do wish you'd stop nagging at me about that bwrat—it's got monotonous."

CHAPTER VIII.

BOOTLES.

We spake of many a vanished scene,
Of what we once had thought and said,
Of what had been, and might have been,
And who was changed, and who was dead.
The Fire of Drift-wood.

A FEW days after this Lucy appeared in the anteroom with an open letter in his hand.

"Bootles is coming to-day," he announced.

"By Jove! you don't mean it? Does he stay in barracks?"

"Yes; he'll have Alison's rooms; he's going to stay thwree days."

"And who puts Mignon up?" Preston asked.

"Oh! Mrs. Gwray, of course," Lucy answered.

And sure enough, a few hours later, Bootles came—came and was hailed with extravagant expressions of joy by one and all.

"Dear old chap—how are you?" cried Miles.

"You're getting fat, Bootles," exclaimed Allardyce—"you should knock off the liquor, old fellow. You don't know how much better you'd be for it."

"No, perhaps not, colonel," was Bootles's cheery answer. "You must have a talk to Brandon about it; he is my keeper, you know, in a spiritual sense."

"Oh! Brandon is simply incorrigible," said the commanding officer, shaking his head dolefully. "I can not make the very faintest impression on him; he's altogether beyond my skill or eloquence."

"Which doesn't prove him to be very far away," muttered Miles, in an under-tone to Power.

"Gad, no, that's true. I wonder when *we* shall manage to get a word with old Bootles?"

Miles shrugged his shoulders. "Oh, Heaven knows," heaving a long sigh; "by Jove, what a bore a proser is! I hope I shall die before I get to be such a driveling idiot as Allardyce is."

"You will, unless you get softening of the brain," laughed Power, in a whisper.

"And how was Brandon when you left?" broke in old Garnet, in a brave attempt to divert the conversation from the commanding officer's favorite subject.

"Pretty fit, I think. What a dear old chap it is!" cried Bootles, heartily. "He drove down to the station with us, and went back with the missus. Sent his best respects to all of you."

"Thanks—thanks awfully. And how's Mrs. Bootles?"

"Very well, indeed, thanks, and looking forward to her trip across the herring-pond with great delight."

"Yes? Ah! I hope you'll both enjoy it. How is it Mignon's not going too?"

"Well, the child's such a wretched sailor; she went out

to Malta with us in the winter and suffered horribly. 'Pon my word, I was glad to bring her home by land. She flatly declined going this time, so we were very glad when Mrs. Gray asked her to pay them a long visit, and Mignon's satisfaction at 'coming home' again is unbounded."

"Not more than ours is to have her," said one or two men together, and then Power asked his old comrade how they had enjoyed the trip to Malta.

"Fairly well," Bootles answered. "They were rather a slow lot on board, unfortunately. In fact, there was only one bride—a very short allowance, you know; she was desperately spooney, and gave herself insufferable airs; proclaimed that she was the only *lady* on board, which set one or two married men's backs up. No, not mine, for the missus had been dancing attendance on Mignon and hadn't shown at all. But at the same time I thought it was rather rough on the other ladies, so I joined the opposition and made myself as unpleasant as I could."

"Did you, though? And how did you manage that, old fellow?" Garnet asked, for making himself unpleasant was not a common habit of Bootles.

Bootles laughed. "Well, I made myself obnoxious in a variety of ways; for instance, I used to get up early, desperately early, and send every blessed waiter and servant I could find to knock hard at their cabin-door and ask if they were ready for tea. I sent fourteen of one sort or another one morning. Lord, how Fluffe did swear!" with a gay laugh at the remembrance of it.

"Was Fluffe he or she?" inquired Miles.

"Oh! he. She was 'Gerty darling!' By the way, it

got to be a sort of by-word all over the ship—if a fellow wanted the loan of a cigarette, he would just step up to another and say, 'Gerty darling, can you lend me a cigarette?'—and one day, just after we left Gib, a little chap belonging to the Third Royal Irish, little perky chap with a sharp cheeky voice, suddenly laid hold of Fluffe, and clean forgetting what the origin of the joke had been, said, 'I say, Gerty darling, can you give me a bit of string?'

"Fluffe glared at him in speechless rage for a minute, and then blurted out, 'What the devil d'you mean, sir?'

"'Hey?' inquired the other—then remembered—'Oh! —er—only wanted a bit of string,' he said, innocently; 'but if you haven't such a thing about you, I dare say the steward can oblige me.'

"I thought Fluffe was going to have a fit on the strength of it; he stared at the little chap for a moment as if he couldn't make up his mind which end to begin eating him at, and then he turned on his heel and off he went downstairs—I love to say upstairs and down-stairs on board ship, it riles the sailors so awfully—to his cabin, banging the door after him as if he was trying to shiver it to splinters. I took the opportunity," Bootles added, in a casual sort of tone—"of making myself particularly disagreeable to him, for instead of sending servants to *ask* if they were ready for afternoon tea, I sent the tea instead. I believe I sent eleven lots altogether."

"Fluffe must have loved you, Bootles," laughed Preston.

"No, I don't think he did, somehow," Bootles answered. "From the very first, Fluffie did not take to me. I don't

know why, I'm sure. His wife never attempted to disguise the fact that she thought me a most detestable person.''

"I dare say she did; you know you can be very nasty when you like,'' said Miles, laughing. "Look how fearfully you used to sit upon me in the old days!''

"I did it for your good,'' answered Bootles, with promptitude and a pious air.

"Oh! I've no doubt. Well, how long are you going to stay?''

"Three days,'' answered Bootles.

"Three days! why, that's like nothing! Are you dining with the Grays or with us to-night?''

"Oh! I'm coming to you, if I may. Mrs. Gray has given me leave to dine at mess each night. But I promised to go back to tea—she has people this afternoon. Any of you coming with me?''

"I am,'' answered Lucy; "I'm going to see my sweetheart.''

"Very well, come along,'' said Bootles, cheerily. "Are any of you coming?'' addressing the others.

The answers he received were as diverse as the forms of the Christian religion; but as those forms all keep one and the same goal in view, so did the answers all tend to one end—that of excuse.

"Mrs. Gray—oh! well, Bootles,'' began the colonel, briskly, "I should like to go with you, of course, but the fact is, I've promised to address a meeting in the town to-night, and must have an hour to myself to look up my facts, you know—yes, one must have facts—nothing like

setting your house upon a rock. Make my excuses to Mrs. Gray, if she asks for me, won't you? Good-bye, old fellow; very glad to see you again. Always delighted to see an old face, and yours above all others. Only wish I could bring you to see things in a different light, you know. Good-bye, good-bye.'"

"That's what the colonel calls a word in season," remarked Miles, dryly. "You've heard the last joke about him, Bootles?"

"No, I haven't."

"By Jove! you don't mean it? I thought everybody had heard of it by this time. Well, the chief went to a levee the other day, thought he'd put in his usual word in season, I dare say, for he was so abstracted when he went in, that instead of keeping his wits about him, he did a spread-eagle on the floor just at the royal feet. 'Why, Colonel Allardice,' said his royal highness, with a twinkle in his eye, 'I'm sorry to see *you* like this.' Since then," Miles ended, "we have had two schools of thought on the subject: one consisting of the colonel and Colonel Garnet, who both think H. R. H. meant to imply that the chief was screwed—the other, consisting of all the rest of us, who tell the chief he only meant to express regret for the fall. We all assure the chief several times every day that it couldn't be otherwise; but he refuses to be comforted. And it never seems to enter his head that a little mild poke at his 'principles' was at the bottom of it."

Bootles laughed heartily. "I shall tell him I saw he had been at the last levee," he exclaimed. "Well, are any of you coming?"

"I think not to-day, Bootles, old fellow, as you're dining here to-night," answered old Garnet.

"Got a lot of letters—must write 'em," said Miles.

"Booked for a couple of teas already," said Preston.

"Oh, I called yesterday," said Power.

On the whole, Bootles was perhaps more surprised than he had ever been in the whole of his life. When he had left the Scarlet Lancers, little Mrs. Gray had been quite the most popular lady in the regiment. And to come back and find so great and marked a change—it was incredible. However, the next excuser threw a light on the mystery.

"Fact is," he blurted out, "I'd like to go awfully, but I really *can not* stand that ghoul that hangs round about Mrs. Gray at all times and seasons. I really can not."

"Who is she?" Bootles asked.

"Oh, a girl who has got to know Mrs. Gwray, and sticks to her like a limpet," Lucy replied. "Well, *I* don't particularly mind the limpet; so come along, Bootles.

"She wreally is a dwreadful cwreature," he told his old friend as they walked across the square. "I don't know, I'm sure, what the idea of her devotion to Mrs. Gwray is. All the same, it's a bore for Mrs. Gwray, who is just about too good-natured to live. Pwreston insists that she has designs upon Miles, but for my part I should be inclined to give the palm in favor of old Garnet. I dare say she'll be utterly devoted to Mignon whilst she is hewre."

"I see," returned Bootles, with a mental resolve that he would give Mignon a hint not to encourage the lady in question.

Just at that moment a troop of children came flying

round the corner at racing speed, Jack among them, and, as usual, as soon as she caught sight of Lucy, she stopped short and treated him to a florid display of her piano-dolly system of saluting.

"Good heavens, Lucy!" ejaculated Bootles, to whom this sort of thing was entirely new.

"Aw—how d' do? Good-day," said Lucy, with a wave of the hand to the young person of the elf-like locks and black wild eyes; and then, they having got well past the youngsters, he turned to Bootles and added, in a tone of impressive misery, "Bootles, old man, that bwrat is the vewry *curse* of my life!"

For the very soul of him Bootles could not help laughing, but a moment later he asked, in a very sympathetic tone, "Why, old fellow, how is it? What does it all mean?"

"It's just this," Lucy answered, with a groan. "A little while ago I did a good action, but, d—n me! I've wrued the day ever since."

"Why, Lucy!" in surprise.

"Yes, it's twrue," with a doleful shake of the head. "It was in this way, Bootles. I pwromised to look after a dog belonging to one of the fellows, and one fearfully wet night, just before mess, I went down to see the cwreature, and found a child out in the wrain cwrying bitterly. I found she'd been beaten by the bwrute of a step-mother—*you* know what a woman is when she is jealous as death and as mean as the gwrave—and I just put a stop to it once for all. But," with a long sigh, "fwrom that day to this that child has been the vewry curse of my life. I've no doubt the poor little devil is—er—gwrateful and all that,

you know—but I've got so blooming sick of her gwratitude, you don't know."

"But how? Why?"

"How? Because she haunts me—dogs my footsteps—waits and watches for me from morning till night; and when she catches me, which is at least a dozen times a day, she twreats me to that dip-courtesy style of thing that you saw just now."

"But why don't you stop it?" Bootles asked.

"I *can't* stop it," returned Lucy, fretfully—"how can I? The poor little devil is taught to make her obedience to her betters, and I can't go and deliberately wrevolutionize all her fixed ideas at one blow. And the child means well too. She—she worked me an antimacassar."

"By Jove, you don't say so!"

"But I do; and— Oh, well!"—with another groan—"I shall have to bear it, or—or—exchange, or wretire, or something. If Mignon was old enough, I should get marwried at once and leave, for, as times go now, life isn't worth living. Hollo, there's my sweetheart at the window!"

A moment later they had entered the house, and Mignon came flying down the stairs to meet them. Lucy's face brightened instantly.

"Why—er—Mignon, my sweetheart," he cried.

Mignon flung her arms round his neck.

"Dear Lal, I've come home again," she whispered.

"Nay—the Court is your home now," said Lucy, with a soft laugh.

Mignon looked at Bootles.

"Well, the Court is very nice," she answered; "and of course it's mother's home, you know, but Bootles and I, we *always* call the regiment 'home;' don't we, Bootles?"

"Always," answered Bootles, with a laugh.

Mignon put her hand within Lucy's arm, and drew him upstairs. "Come up, Lal; Mrs. Gray's got a hot muffin for you," she told him; so they went upstairs together.

Mrs. Gray got up from her tea-table to greet Lucy, and then Bootles began to get a sort of idea of the reason his old comrades one and all had for shunning Mrs. Gray's drawing-room now. For the young lady who was known among the officers of the Scarlet Lancers as "the Ghoul" had arrived, and was in full war-paint and high feather, waiting for conquest.

"Let me pour out the tea for you, dear Mrs. Gray," she began; "I know *just* what Captain Lucy likes—two lumps of sugar and *heaps* of cream—don't you, Captain Lucy?" with a fetching glance, which proved almost too much for Bootles's powers of self-command.

Lucy went and stood by the table until she should have poured the tea out. Miss Dudley—for such was "the Ghoul's" proper name—had not often such a good chance of showing off her powers of coquetry and fascination, and she lengthened the pleasant little office out as far as possible.

And Mignon, still keeping tight hold of her Lal's arm, watched her with her sweet sapphire-colored eyes wide open. Miss Dudley was disgusted. What girl, she asked herself—yes, she called herself a girl still, though she was a good deal older than Lucy—could have a fair chance of making

any impression on a man, with that dreadful child with her great wide-open eyes staring at her all the time? How she wished she would go away! But Mignon, having not the very smallest intention of deserting her Lal for a single moment, did nothing of the kind, but waited, in open wonder at the lady's manners, until she should give them their tea and let them go off to the window and enjoy it in peace.

"Mignon, my sweetheart," said Lucy, "did you—er—wait to have tea with me?"

"Well, not quite, Lal," in a tone of apology. "I was so thirsty I couldn't; but I only had a little cup."

"That's wright."

"Do you want a cup of tea, my dear?" said Miss Dudley, addressing poor Mignon in a distant and patronizing sort of tone.

"If you please," answered Mignon, politely. Then seeing that she laid the sugar-tongs down after giving her but one lump, added, "Two lumps, if you please."

Miss Dudley measured her with her ghoul-like eye. "Little girls," she said, severely, "should take what is given to them; if you were my little girl I should not allow you to have any likes and dislikes," and as she spoke she filled the cup nearly to the brim with tea. "I am afraid," she said, as she added the cream in very small proportion, "your mother spoils you, my dear."

"My mother is very pretty," returned Mignon, promptly.

Lucy turned sharply away to hide the laughter which curled his lips. He crossed the room to the large bay-win-

dow, and set his cup of tea on a little table, then went back to the tea-tray just in time to hear Mignon add, "And my mother likes to make *everybody* happy, if she can."

"Mignon, you have that cup," said Lucy, anxious to get her away lest her fearless, outspoken tongue might lead her into saying more than would be expedient. And then he took up the cup which Miss Dudley had made for the child, and went off with it and a plate of muffins which the servant had just brought in.

"Captain Lucy, Captain Lucy," called "the Ghoul" after him, "there is neither sugar nor cream enough in that cup for you."

Lucy looked back serenely. "If it's good enough for my sweetheart, Miss Dudley, it's quite good enough for me," he said, sweetly, and went on his way to join Mignon, leaving Miss Dudley, to use an expressive phrase, "struck all of a heap."

"Lal," whispered Mignon, "I don't like her."

Lucy shrugged his shoulders without replying further.

"She is rude," Mignon persisted.

"Never mind," returned Lucy, wondering, as he looked at the exquisite angelic face, with its aureole of bright golden hair and its great shining sapphire-colored eyes, how any woman on earth could show such petty meanness as to try to snub and slight her. "Never mind, my sweetheart, let us talk about something else."

Now Mignon was at all times intensely interested in the smallest and most insignificant items of barrack news, so Lucy told her everything he could think of that had happened to anything or anybody lately, and finally wound up

by telling her all about Jack, and how she had worked him an antimacassar.

Mignon was deeply interested.

"Her step-mother must have been something like *her*," nodding her bright head in Miss Dudley's direction.

"Hush—h!" murmured Lucy, in warning. "I'm going for some more tea. Will you come and make it for me, since Miss Dudley has deserted the board?"

Almost every head in the room was turned to watch the lovely child go to the table with the handsome soldier beside her, and only one pair of eyes were not brimful of admiration. She was just eleven years old, tall and slim and full of grace as a kitten, with an exquisite little face, fair as a flower and framed in masses of waving, curling, golden hair. She was quite plainly dressed in a blue velvet frock just the color of her eyes, coming to the knees without a flounce or frill, and her only ornament was a little gold brooch with the word "Mignon" upon it—a brooch which had been Lucy's gift. What a lovely child she was, people whispered to one another. It was no wonder that Captain Lucy was so fond of her, and always declared he meant to marry her—no wonder at all!

By the time the long hand of the little traveling clock on the chimney-shelf reached the quarter to seven Mrs. Gray's guests had all departed—with the exception of Miss Dudley, who made a practice there, as in most other places, of hanging to the last minute. Major Gray and Bootles went up to dress then, as they were both going back with Lucy, and presently came down again, one resplendent in mess dress, the other in plain evening clothes.

"Oh, Mignon," said Lucy, suddenly, "have you bwrought your habit? For I've got a pony for you."

"How jolly!" Mignon cried. "Oh, yes, Lal; I brought my habit, of course."

"Can you spare her to-morwrow, Mrs. Gwray?" he asked of the major's wife.

"Oh, yes!"

"Many thanks. Power has a mount for you, Bootles," Lucy continued; "so pewrhaps you'll come out to-morwrow morning."

"All right. We shall be charmed, eh, Mignon?" answered Bootles. "Shall we say ten o'clock? If that won't be inconvenient to you, Mrs. Gray."

"Not at all," Mrs. Gray replied. And so it was settled.

And then Mrs. Gray and Mignon went to the door to see them off, never noticing a forlorn little figure who had tracked Lucy to the house, and was standing then clinging to the lamp-post.

"He ain't got so much as a look for *me*, now as Miss Meenon's come," she muttered, with a long sigh. "Ay, I feel just as if I could *do* for 'er."

CHAPTER IX.

A BURSTING HEART.

O little hearts, that throb and beat
With such impatient feverish heat,
Such limitless and strong desires;
Mine that so long has glowed and burned,
With passions into ashes turned,
Now covers and conceals its fires.

Weariness.

When Jack Henderson had seen the three officers enter the cab which was awaiting them, and Mrs. Gray and Mignon go back into the house, she left the slight shelter of the lamp-post and took her way home.

She was very unhappy. She was sore at heart and miserable because "her capt'n" had passed her by without recognition, being fully taken up with "Miss Meenon." She was bursting with admiration and love, and right willingly would she have laid herself down and licked the dust under his feet; but all her love and dog-like faithful worship did nothing for her, it brought her no nearer to the object of her adoration. Child-like, Jack was very sensitive—nay, hers was more than the sensitiveness of a mere child's intuition and clear perception of the truth. She knew as well as if she had been able to put it into words—which she was not—that the captain would willingly have passed her by, and that the full and brimming over measure of her gratitude only bored him. She knew perfectly

well that his "Aw! how d'you do?" was merely a formal reply to her courtesies, just as little prompted by his heart as was the raising of his hand in answer to the salutes of the troopers who saluted him as a matter of duty.

Yes, she knew and felt all this by the quick instincts which had been made unnaturally acute and sharp by the ill-usage of her step-mother and the anxiety of her love; she knew it and felt it, though she was not capable of putting it into words and hardly into thoughts. But not for worlds would she have given up her intercourse with him, limited as it was; for the other barrack bairns did not know other than that Jack was highly honored and distinguished among them by the notice and patronage of Captain Lucy. No, Jack would not have foregone that honor for the world—her pride not being equal to her power of perception.

She wandered back to barracks, and got a scolding for her long absence. Probably in the old days she would have had a beating, too, but thanks to Captain Lucy there was no fear of that now. She eat her supper in silence, and with indifference to the scolding, because her heart was full and troubled with other things; and then, poor mite, she got into bed and cried herself to sleep, choking down her sobs lest *she* should hear them, and hiding her head under the bedclothes. Poor child! the appearance of "Miss Meenon" on the scene seemed to be the very last straw to the load of her disappointment and humiliation—almost as if she had come that Jack might see how different Lucy's manner was to one whom he loved in contrast to one whom he scarcely tolerated.

It was then holiday-time, so when the morning came and she had had breakfast, and had done one or two little jobs about the house, and had executed several little errands for her step-mother, she prowled up to the officers' stables in the hope of seeing Lucy go to visit his horses. In that she was disappointed, but as she was loitering about the door she saw Lucy's groom come out leading his chestnut mare, Molly Maguire, and what she thought was his polo pony carrying a side-saddle, though, in truth, it was the pony he had got for Mignon. Jack's heart gave an indignant throb of disgust and jealous indignation when she saw it.

"Umph! going to take 'er out riding," she said between her teeth.

She watched the groom go round to the principal door of the officers' quarters, and then, when Lucy appeared and had mounted Molly Maguire, apparently receive an order, for he touched his hat and walked off across the square at a smart walk, leading the pony.

Poor Jack's heart was so sore at this further proof of "her capt'n's" love for Mignon that she let him pass by without even attempting to attract his notice; and Lucy never saw her! But as soon as Lucy had started she gave chase, and between running and dodging contrived to reach her ground of observation at the lamp-post immediately after he got to Major Gray's door. She saw Lucy dismount and go into the house, then, after a few moments had passed, he came out again, followed by Mignon and Captain Ferrers.

Mignon in her smart, well-cut blue habit, with her golden

hair floating about her shoulders, and her lovely fair face shaded by a felt hat, was a perfect picture, yet a picture such as made poor Jack sick to look upon. She watched her as she stood patting the pony's neck, and then putting her gloves on. And then she saw Lucy—*her* "capt'n"—put her up, and set her stirrup and habit straight; and Mignon smiled and laughed at him and patted him on the shoulder, until Jack could fairly have shrieked aloud in her rage and jealousy.

However, in less than three minutes they had turned the corner, and Jack and the lamp-post had the street to themselves; and as it was obviously of no use to wait there, she went back to barracks again. Polly Armstrong met her in the square.

"Why, Jack Henderson," said she, "what ever 'as gorne wrong with you?"

"Naught at all," curtly returned Jack, who would not have confessed the truth for worlds to Polly Armstrong or anybody else.

"No? Well, you look mortal bad, that's all. I say, 'ave you seen the capt'n and Miss Meenon?"

"I see 'em larst night," replied Jack, with admirable indifference.

"Oh! you did. My, but ain't Miss Meenon pretty! Don't I just wish I was 'er! I should think your capt'n won't take no more notice of you, now she's come," ended Polly Armstrong, shrewdly.

"Yes, he will," cried Jack, furiously. "Nothing won't make no difference 'tween my capt'n an' me, never you fear, Polly Armstrong. As for Miss Meenon, I don't know

as I think so much of her; she's only a poor bit of a thing, a'ter all."

"Ay, may be—but she's A 1 with the capt'n, for all that," returned Polly Armstrong, with the air of a philosopher. "An' if he likes that pink-an-'white chiney-doll sort—why, there's naught more to be said about it."

"Perhaps not," said Jack, slipping back into her air of indifference. "Well, I'm going to the officers' quarters. Where are you going, Polly?"

"Oh! I'm going to fetch the flowers for our mess," answered Polly, meaning the sergeants' mess. "You'd better come with me, Jack."

"No; I can't. I'll come round for you after dinner," Jack replied; and so the two girls parted, each going her different way.

Now Jack's way led her up to Lucy's quarters, for on her way back from the lamp-post she had been thinking over the past—she had been thinking how kind he had been to her that day when he found her in his rooms, the day she had taken the offering of her own work; and it had occurred to her poor little troubled and jealous heart that if she could only creep up there once more and see for herself that her own work was still in use—not cast aside as a thing of no value, but reposing sweetly between the little table and the big photograph book—why, if she could see that, she thought she shouldn't feel quite so bad about recent events as she had been doing ever since yesterday.

She therefore, with the stealth of an Indian scout—that is, to put it in a tragic sort of manner—made her way up the stairs, and after several hair's-breadth escapes from

Cooper and other servants who were about their masters' rooms, to say nothing of several pail-laden ladies "on the strength" who were bed-making, and doing such like useful and essential offices, she found herself at the door—*and the door was locked.*

For a minute or two Jack stood like a peri at the gate of paradise—then she turned away, and went slowly downstairs again, and out into the fresh bright sunshine like a child in a dream—her senses seemed numbed—her heart almost stopped. She gave no heed to whether there was any one to see her or not; she only thought to get out into the fresh air and *breathe.*

Once outside, the child stood gasping for breath, *for air,* then she lifted her eyes as a burst of gay laughter fell upon her ear, and saw "her capt'n," with Mignon and Bootles, come riding down to the mess, the golden-haired girl in the middle, and the men on either side.

Jack looked and saw, and then she turned away and walked unsteadily behind the colonel's house, where she sat down upon a stone, and I believe she fainted.

CHAPTER X.

GENEROSITY.

Then shall the good stand in immortal bloom,
In the fair gardens of that second birth;
And each bright blossom mingle its perfume
With that of flowers which never bloomed on earth.

Good Care.

THERE was such a fuss over Mignon when she reached the mess; all the officers who were waiting about for lunch streamed out to meet and greet her.

"So you're coming back to us, Mignon," cried Miles. "It'll be quite like old times again."

"Yes; and I'm to stay three months."

"Three months! Why," laughed Colonel Garnet, "by that time you'll have grown enough to be married."

Mignon drew herself up with an unconscious air of dignity, as if she rather resented the liberty of this speech.

"Is it to be Lucy or me?" he went on, teasingly.

"I am going to marry Lal, of course," she answered; "but if—"

"You weren't, you wouldn't take Colonel Garnet—eh, Mignon?" struck in Miles, who was as irrepressible as ever.

"No, I don't think I would," said Mignon, promptly.

"Never mind, sir—nev-er mind," cried Miles, with a laugh.

"What!" exclaimed Bootles, with an air of intense surprise; "do you mean to say that old joke is not dead yet?

Bless me! it must be worn out and threadbare by this time —quite unrecognizable."

"Yes, it's on the boards yet," answered old Garnet; "for we haven't been troubled with much inventive genius in the regiment since you left us, Bootles, old man."

"Thank you," said Bootles, taking off his hat with a flourish, amid a general roar of laughter.

"Oh, I didn't mean *that* at all. No; I meant that the stale old jokes have to do duty still, because nobody's got brains enough to invent any more. As for Miles there, he has regularly run to seed since you left us, and he sets up for being clever, which is tiresome."

"I don't set up or aspire to marry Mignon, colonel," said Miles.

"Mignon wouldn't look at you," returned Colonel Garnet.

"Mignon is—er—not going to look at anybody but *me*," put in Lucy, in his serenest tones. "I don't know what you fellows think about it, but *I*—call it extwremely impertinent of you to be bandying words about my sweetheart."

"Well, suppose, instead of bandying words, or compliments, or anything of the kind, we arrange about taking Mrs. Gray and Mignon out on the coach this afternoon," interposed old Garnet, good-naturedly. "You'd like that, eh, Mignon, my pet?"

"Oh, awfully!" answered Mignon.

"Can you answer for your wife, Gray?"

"Oh, yes; we were going for a drive at three," Major Gray answered.

"Then we'll bring the coach round at that time, eh?"

"Yes, colonel—yes," the others agreed; and then Preston asked, "Is old Bootles to take the ribbons?"

"Do, Bootles!" cried several of the others.

"I should like it; one would feel like old times again," Bootles answered. And so they arranged it, and Bootles and Mignon parted from them, and rode off together.

"Mignon," began Bootles, when they were clear of the mess.

"Yes, dear," said Mignon.

"What do you think of that Miss Dudley?"

"I don't like her," answered Mignon, decidedly.

"Why?"

"Because she's rude—and cross—and—and—I don't like her. Lal can't bear her," Mignon replied.

"Oh"—thinking it necessary to pursue that subject no further—"by the bye, did Lal tell you anything about a child?"

"Yes—Jack her name is. She worked him an antimacassar, all by herself. Lal says she's a half-wild creature."

"Well, now, you might be able to do Lal a good turn about her."

"Could I, Bootles? How?"

"It seems that she persists in making elaborate courtesies to him, no matter when or where she sees him, which bores him to death almost. Now if you get a chance, you might just give her a hint not to do it so much—do it very gently, don't you know, Mignon, for it won't do to frighten the poor little thing, or make her think she's been doing wrong. Do you understand, my bird?"

"Yes, I think I understand," Mignon answered. "I'm to try and stop Lal being bored, but not to hurt the little girl's feelings in any way."

"That's just it, my bird; and now let me lift you down," Bootles said, as they reached the door of the Grays' house.

One day, about a week after Bootles had gone, Mignon was going up to the barracks with Mrs. Gray, who was in the habit of doing a great deal of real friendly and helpful visiting among the married women of the regiment. Just at the gates they met Lucy.

"You are the very man I want, Captain Lucy," she said, as they met. "Are you very busy this morning?"

"Not at all. I am going over to the dwrill-field now for half an hour—after that I am quite at your service. What can I do for you?"

"Well, it is one of my mornings among the married women, and I didn't want to take Mignon with me," Mrs. Gray began.

"Oh! Certainly not. Mignon, my sweetheart, come with me. Mrs. Gwray, I'll take her acwross the dwrill-field to the walk by the wriver; there's a seat there, and she can wait for me, or thwrow stones into the water for Zara"—meaning the big colly which was then standing with her nose in Mignon's hand.

"That's all right. Then where shall I pick her up?"

"I'll take her down to the mess, and be on the lookout for you."

"Very well," answered the major's wife, willingly. So

they parted, Mrs. Gray turning in at the gates, Lucy and Mignon going in the opposite direction to the drill-field, which lies between the Fulford Road and the river Ouse.

They crossed the field and went out upon the broad and handsome walk, which with its avenue of superb trees is one of the finest river-side walks to be found. "By Jove! there's young Jack!" exclaimed Lucy. "Would you like to talk to her a little?"

"Yes, very much," answered Mignon.

Jack was all alone, as she had been nearly every day during all the past week. Poor little forlorn barrack bairn that she was, she sat on the end of the long seat brooding over her jealousy and her envy of "Miss Meenon." She started violently as Lucy called her by name, and jumped up from her seat, trembling in every limb, with her pale face dyed a vivid scarlet hue; but as she saw the lovely golden-haired child beside "her capt'n," the pleasure all died out of her heart and the vivid blushes out of her face.

"Er—Jack!" said Lucy, who naturally guessed nothing of the tumult of emotions raging and seething within the child's wild, untutored heart, "this is Miss Mignon, whom I—er—dare say you have seen before. She is coming to talk to you a little."

Jack made the officer her best obedience, but she took no manner of notice of Mignon; and Lucy, being short-sighted, never noticed it, but having, as he thought, started the two girls in a conversation, went back to his work in the drill-field, leaving them together.

Mignon sat down upon the seat—Jack remained standing where she was; the one girl was the embodiment of

light and purity, carefully guarded and trained—the other was, at that moment, the very picture of all the evil passions run riot.

"Jack, won't you come and sit down?" Mignon asked, in gentle, clear tones.

No answer from the little shabby figure turned half away, with one shoulder thrust sullenly up above the other.

Mignon put her hand invitingly on the seat and patted it, in invitation for Jack to seat herself there.

"Do come and sit here, Jack," she pleaded.

"I don't want to," answered Jack, curtly.

Mignon sighed; she did not often meet with this kind of rebuff, and hardly knew how to battle with it.

"Captain Lucy told me all about you, Jack," she went on, with a brave effort to break the barrier of what she believed was only shyness on Jack's part. "He showed me the beautiful antimacassar you worked for him. I did like it," she added, sighing to think how difficult she found crochet, and how little of it she had ever accomplished—and completed, none.

"Did you do it all yourself, Jack?" she asked.

"What's that to you?" demanded Jack, fiercely, suddenly finding her tongue, and turning upon Mignon in a blaze of fury.

Mignon, who had risen from the seat, shrunk back before the violence of Jack's manner.

"I only wanted to know, because I thought it so clever of you," she answered. "I couldn't do it, however much I wanted. Why won't you come and talk to me?"—and then— Oh! What was it?—a rush—a scuffle—a shrill,

piercing cry—and the next moment Mignon was struggling in the water, just at that part where the river is deep and dangerous.

For an instant Jack was as one paralyzed, and all the wild and passionate hatred for her rival had gone out of her heart; but the next moment an awful realization of what "her capt'n" would feel if "Miss Meenon" should die came to her mind, and she dashed down the bank and into the deep, swift-running water just as the alarm was given to those in the drill-field above.

She was utterly without fear. "Miss Meenon," she called, "ketch hold o' me. I'll get you out;" and then there came an extra swing of the current of the already flooded river, and the two girls were swept apart—to meet in this life never, forever!

Mignon had already sunk twice, and rose for the third time, when Lucy came running down to the bank and flung himself in headlong to save her. He had seen Jack's wild gesticulations on the walk, and as she disappeared knew that she had gone in in an attempt to save Mignon.

"Brave child!" he muttered; then as he and one of the men reached the bank, said aloud, "You go for little Henderson," and dashed in the next moment after Mignon.

It was just "touch and go;" but he got her out alive—senseless, but still breathing. Power, who had reached the walk but a minute later than himself, had already got a gate off its hinges and took Mignon out of his arms.

"We'll get her up to hospital at once, old fellow," he said. "She's all right; she'll be no worse. Don't dis-

tress yourself now, Lucy; she won't be a ha'porth the worse."

The fright had made Lucy's face as ghastly as death, and he let Power take the senseless girl from him and lay her on the gate already covered with coats and jackets.

"Go and get your wet things off and some brandy into you at once," were Power's last words, as four stalwart soldiers went off at a sling trot with the gate and its light burden, and he ran after them.

But Lucy would not leave the bank until the fate of the other child was ascertained, and as Power left him he turned back to the river with anxious, eager gaze. Ah! poor Jack had gone under twice, each time rising far out of the soldier's reach. Each time he swam with strong and powerful strokes of his stalwart arms to reach the spot just as she disappeared. And then when for the third time the dark head rose to sight, far away down-stream, he made a desperate effort, and as she went down again, dived after her and brought her up in one arm.

"He's done it—done it! By heavens, what a splendid fellow he is!" cried Lucy, whose knees were shaking under him till he could scarcely stand.

"Lord love him!" cried a woman, who with several others had turned up, as women always do when any great excitement is afloat.

"Ay, but the bairn's mother will bless 'im for this day's work!" put in another.

"Have a hand, Simpson," exclaimed a broad-shouldered trooper who was already knee-deep in the water to help his

comrade; and then the man staggered up the bank and laid his burden carefully down upon the seat.

"It's no go," he said, sorrowfully; "the little lass is dead!"

"Not dead?" shrieked one of the women.

"Oh! the poor bit bairn!" cried another, beginning to sob.

"Give the child a chance," ordered Lucy, whose senses had come back in the moment of need. "Get her up to hospital at once. No; don't wait for a gate—just take her head and feet. Yes! Now quick—as fast as you can wrun."

"Eh, puir bit bairn, they may make all the haste they can," sighed the Scotchwoman; "they'll be soon enough, for it's all over for her in this world. Puir bit bairn!"

"And she went in to try and save the little lady," added the other, who had been gathering all the information she could. "The gentleman what saved the other told me so. Ay, an' he has a kind heart, for his eyes was full of tears."

"Puir bit bairn!" sighed the Scotchwoman again.

"Maybe they'll bring her round," suggested the other, hopefully.

"Never, in this world," answered the Scotchwoman. "I know the look o' death too well, my dear; I've seen it too often to be deceived."

And it was even so. At that moment the two surgeons in the hospital were shaking their heads over Jack Henderson's little body, and Lucy was trying in a choking voice to tell Private Henderson what had happened.

"My little lass!" Henderson kept saying, in a dazed kind of way—"my little motherless lass!"

"She was as bwrave as a lion, Henderson," Lucy told him. "God help you, Henderson, and keep you from gwrieving! He has taken her to Himself, and Heaven knows a bwraver, nobler, bigger heart never went to Him —never."

And then, with great tears streaming down his cheeks, he told them the story of the child's gratitude, and how she had paid him by "her own work;" and then, when all was over, and the doctors insisted on his going to change his clothes, he bent down and kissed the dead child's white face tenderly.

"Henderson, keep me a piece of her hair," he said, huskily, and went hurriedly away.

"I'm glad he kissed the bairn, she thought so much of him," said Henderson, miserably, as he stood beside his dead child. "I only wish that she'd known it."

Ay, if poor Jack had only known it!—had only known that her "capt'n" had come and kissed her as she lay! But, alas! the passionate, loving, jealous heart had fluttered to its rest, and would feel neither good nor evil any more. Ah! it is so often that the things which we have longed for must come to us when we are no longer able to understand or to enjoy them—come to us too late.

That same evening Bootles and Mrs. Ferrers, who were on the eve of starting for the States, came in answer to a telegram which summoned them; for Mignon was, not unnaturally, very feverish and ill.

Bootles had always been her first and dearest, even before

her mother, but it was to her mother that she told a secret when she was well enough to hear all the details of Jack Henderson's death, and of her bravery and courage.

"Mother," she said, "I don't want Lal to know, not a word—"

"About what, my darling?"

"I must tell *some*body, and I don't want him to know—*ever*."

"Then tell me."

"You won't tell even Bootles?"

Mrs. Ferrers shook her head. "Not even Bootles."

"Then I'll tell you, mother. *That poor little girl pushed me into the water on purpose;* we struggled together, but she was stronger than I. But I think she was sorry afterward, for she tried to save me, so I don't want Lal or any one else to know."

Mrs. Ferrers threw her arms about her child and kissed her passionately.

"Oh! my darling, my darling!" she cried. "Keep your brave, true, generous heart, for God who loves you gave it to you. Kiss me, my treasure, kiss me."

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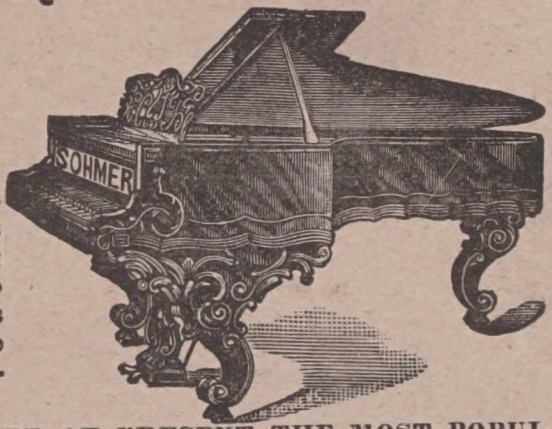

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